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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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So, everyone have their holiday shopping done yet? I do, with almost two weeks to spare! My "new" desk should have arrived yesterday, but the truck that was delivering it had some mechanical problems - the tailgate lift died. So, by the time this week's issue hits the streets, the desk should be here. It will probably still be in four pieces, but at least it will finally be here. Guess I have my weekend project lined up. Also, the last of our presents should arrive on Saturday - a new BIG television. And I mean BIG! Then the battles will commence: who will control the remote! I guess all that's left is the wrapping and labeling of gifts.

It's hard to believe that this year is almost over. And even more amazing is that A-ONE is close to starting its fifth year of publication. I'm actually surprised that we've been around this long. But true to form, Atari users have stuck with us, as well as the machines they continue to use. We continue to get positive feedback about the magazine, and the occasional obligatory negative comments. The positive is probably what keeps us going week after week, year after year. Who knows how long it will last. Perhaps next week, in our final issue of the year, I may reflect more on the past four years. And, perhaps we'll even go further back. We'll see.

All of us here at A-ONE want to wish our readers a happy holiday greeting. It's a great time to spend with family and friends. Just remember to be responsible.

Until next time...

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Reservoir Gods Releases SuperFly

Guildford, England - Dec 13th 2002 - RG, a leading developer of entertainment software for the Atari platform today announced the release of a new action game "SuperFly".

You take the role of madcap inventor Dr Snuggles, on a mission to rescue

his girlfriend from the evil clutches of Professor Evil. Over the course of the game you will pilot a range of different vehicles over a variety of different worlds.

The gameplay takes place over a horizontally scrolling playfield. The game mechanic is simple, yet fiendishly addictive. As you progress through the game you gain experience points which allow you to unlock new game modes and different worlds to play in.

The game features super smooth 60 Frames Per Second action, 21 high score tables, saveable replays, a Soul Calibur style gallery with unlockable portraits and 9 pieces of SID music composed by the award winning MSG.

With four different game types, five game worlds, an epic story mode and many secrets and bonuses, there is enough to keep even the hardened gamer flying high for the foreseeable future.

The game runs on all Atari machines from the humble STFM through to the mighty Falcon. Where extra hardware is detected, it uses the enhanced capabilities.

"SuperFly" can be downloaded from the Reservoir Gods HomePage:

http://www.reservoir-gods.com

About Reservoir Gods:

Reservoir Gods have been developing software for Atari platforms since back in the day (1994). Their products include the art package GodPaint, GameBoy & NES Emulators, the disk magazine Maggie and a range of games including "Double Bobble 2000", the "Tautology" series, "GodPey" and "Chu Chu Rocket".

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Christmas is upon us and I’ve still get lots of shopping to do. Every year, I say "next year, I’m going to get my shopping out of the way early", and every year I end up waiting until the last minute.

No matter. I’ve got it almost down to a science. I know pretty much what I’m going to buy for whom, and where to get it. My only problems occur when one store or another is out of stock. From what I hear, that may be a big problem this year. The stores, anticipating a light shopping season, didn’t load up on stock, and shoppers decided it was time to cut loose a little and do some spending. The result is that stores are running out of things here and there.

That’s probably a good thing in a way. It seems that, more and more, we gauge things by material possessions. When we can simply get what we want

anytime we want, we tend to take things for granted. While a store being out of the latest video game or Barbie incarnation isn't much of an imposition, it is a little tiny reminder that things don't always work out right just because we want them to.

Hell, if things worked out just because we wanted them to, the world would be pure and utter chaos. Think about it.. when was the last time that you wanted something important that didn't conflict with what someone else wanted? That's what being civilized and social is all about.

I was going to mention world strife and contentious political entities now, but we all know what's going on (or we all THINK we know what's going on, depending on your views), so I'll leave it to you to deal with that part on your own.

For many of us, this is the time of the year when we take stock of what we want and what we've accomplished. That's also a good thing. With this season being a special time of year for several of the world's religions, it seems like a good idea to stop and take a breath.

Well, that's enough of that. Let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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On the subject of broadband communications, Kenneth Medin posts:

"Right at this moment I have one Atari with static 192.168.0.129, another with static 192.168.0.9 and a pc that has got 192.168.0.2 from the NAT-box DHCP server, all on the same 255.255.255.0 Ethernet network."

Djordje Vukovic asks Kenneth:

"By the way, about ten days ago we engaged in a discussion on the (mis?)configuration of this network of yours; you made a nice ASCII schematics, remember? but I replied to that message with a delay of several days (suggesting some changes), and there it all stopped. Did you solve that problem meanwhile?"

Kenneth tells Djordje:

"No, I have very little time at the moment. But I did post a follow-up a few days ago. With an error in it as well that another guy corrected. I will however sort this out, possibly during the holidays..."

Peter Slegg fills in some holes for Djordje and Kenneth:

"The ADSL modem is a DHCP server and the manual says that the computer must be set-up to receive an IP address from the modem, i.e be a DHCP client. This information wasn't known to me when I bought the modem but it probably wouldn't have meant much.

I am waiting for a friendly Mac owner to configure the modem with me.

I need to be certain that the router has PPPoA. BT ADSL is PPPoA and this is supported by the modem I have. The router must also have PPPoA otherwise the connection will not work. Most GB cable companies use PPPoE and there are far more routers that support this (older) protocol. I may need to get a combined router/modem for BT ADSL."

John Garone asks:

"Anyone know of a site with sound that CAB (w/Gemjing) can play?"

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells John:

"JemGing can’t play Stereo/16/44, but any mono/8/22 will be played with no problem.

On the other hand, if you want absolutely to play CD-like sound within CAB, Didier MØquignon’s Aniplayer does it very well. Just declare it as a plug-in in CAB. Works great on both my Falcon and my TT."

John tells Jean-Luc that he’s...

"Not sure what you mean by "plug-in".
As an external program, Aniplay works great. I tried it also in place of Gemjing as the sound source but I don’t see how it will work without CAB sending the sound file externally. I was hoping to get CAB to play a sound while viewing an HTML file."

Didier Mequignon tells John:

"Aniplayer is compatible with the GEMJING command line, so Aniplayer can replace GEMJING. The options supported are inside the documentation. It’s enough for CAB calls."

John tells Didier:

"What I’m asking is if CAB could use Gemjing while viewing an HTML web page and sound heard (if there is a sound file in the HTML code. No problem getting Aniplay to work by CAB but not simultaneously! Maybe I should have mentioned I’m running single TOS (4.04) so now I’m thinking it will only allow one program to be active at a time! I’ll look at Aniplay’s docs anyway. Thanks for the input."

The light dawns on Jean-Luc, and he tells John:

"Er... you effectively need a multitasking O.S., sorry."

John now asks about logging into eBay:

"It seems I’m having trouble logging into Ebay using either Dan’s or Oliver’s OVL. Oliver’s returns "cookies being rejected" and with Dan’s the password field returns to be filled again. I’ve tried various combos of configs and Set for their respective OVL. Any thoughts?"

Jean-Luc tells John:

"I think you could achieve it using the MiNT version of the OVL. But you then should have to use MiNT - which could help you with your CAB/GemJing problem as well. <wink> "

John tells Jean-Luc:

"The Ebay login problem is only recent. I’ve always had access! Maybe something was changed on their end! Thanks for the Mint suggestion."

Steve Stupple adds:

"Ebay has done some changes and quite a few software packages have been having problems. I presume it may be due to their integration of PayPal!"

John tells Steve:

"I tried writing to support@ebay.com but they discontinued it so I followed their instructions to go to their contact web page where they ask you to log in! Duh!!!!"

Ken Springer asks about using HD Driver:

"I figure Uwe Seimet will read this eventually. :-)

TT030, 42mf RAM
HDDriver 7.54

Believe it or not, the TT still has the original ST157 hard drive installed in the internal bay. But it puts up a fuss now and again, so I decided to replace it.

I went looking in a local surplus parts store, and found a SCSI drive that had been removed from an Apple computer, presumably a Mac. Made by IBM for Apple, it is a DSAS 3720, 730mb formatted. According to IBM's website, this is a SCSI 2 FAST unit, which I did not know when I bought it for a whopping $15.

Right up front, I will say I've never had complete faith in 7.54, I could never get it to work on my Hades. But I also believe my Hades has a problem, always has. It's an early version.

Attached to my TT is an external ACSI 2 bay unit, I've forgotten who made the host adapter in it.

When the IBM drive is in the ACSI unit, no problem. The drive formatted fine, partitioned fine, I can see it just fine, I can read and write to it. I even installed HDDRIVER.SYS to the first partition.

But mount it in the internal bay??? Nothing. I've tried everything I can think of, the TT will not see it. I've terminated it, and no termination. I've removed the TT's internal SCSI termination resistor packs. I've tried HDDRIVER 6.22, no luck.

Is the problem the fact it is a SCSI 2 unit? Is it 7.54? Is it both?

I'm not out any money, since I can always leave it in the external unit where it works fine, apparently.

I don't mind upgrading to the latest HDDriver if that's the problem.

I'm sure open to suggestions as I need to replace the old ST157N before it fails completely."

Thorsten Gunther tells Ken:

"The problem is - apparently - that you are trying to *boot* from this drive. SCSI2 drives usually expect the command initiator to have an SCSI ID, yet the TT has none. The only means to work around this is writing yourself a new ROM file and patch it with TosPatch 3.06

<http://www.stud.uni-hamburg.de/users/in5y280/tospatch.html>

Well, actually I do not know whether there's a TosPatch for the English version of TOS 3.06, but the patches (or at least *the* patch) themselves can be applied manually. Afterwards, split TOS into burnable ROM files and then burn them onto EPROMs. You will get CRC errors if you only apply this single patch and don't remove the CRC checksum subroutine, but the TT will boot OK from your HDD.

You could boot from the disk drive and let HDDriver set the TT's ID (it *is* capable of doing so), but IMHO that would be a *real* pain in the ass."

Ken tells Thorsten:

"Correct, it was my plan to boot from this drive.

I sure don't know what kind of a PITA this would be, not sure how to do it. But it's either this, or searching out a different SCSI drive at the store. Not an impossible job, but a true time consuming one!"

Peter Schneider tells Ken:

"No, you must not do so. The TT *must* be terminated. If there are external drives, the last one is to be terminated too. If there's non, terminate the internal (your problem) drive.

In any case, you may boot from an external drive! Just tell HDDRUTIL to do so!

What's about TermPwr? ID collision? Termination?

Right now, I'm running 3 IBMs (DCAS, 4.3, 2.1, 2.1 GB), the big one in the internal bay with no problems. All three had been running in PCs before."

Lonny Pursell asks Ken if he's...

"Tried turning on bus arbitration in HD Driver?
The Dayna units won't even show up unless you do."

Ken tells Lonny:

"I've certainly got nothing to lose by trying.

But wait, since I want to boot from this drive, that won't work since it can't see the drive to run HDDRIVER.SYS to turn the arbitration on.
<Grin>"

Lonny replies:

"Hmm.. yeah that is certainly a problem! I forgot the dyna was the last unit in my chain."

As Ken initially predicted, Uwe Seimet sees the post and replies:

"Note that the Hades is not supported officially anyway, because its hardware is known to be not fully Atari-compatible.

No, SCSI-2 and SCSI-3 work fine, as other users will confirm.

Have you already tried the current demo version? Any SCSI drive should work, if not up to now it has always been a problem of cables or termination."

Ken tells Uwe:

"I got my first version of HDDriver with the Hades, and then the incompatibilities started becoming apparent. I gave up on 7.54 and went back to 6.22 which never gave me any problems. And 7.54 worked fine on my TT.

I didn't know there was a current demo available. I'll download it from your website and try it."

Gordon Campbell asks about Highwire, the new browser:

"Anyone knows the URL or where I can get info for the Atari browser project called Highwire please?"

Adam Klobukowski passes the URL to Gordie:

"http://highwire.atari-users.net"

Mark Beller asks for ideas about where to get 3.5" double density disks:

"I have a load of ST disk images, but only a few 3.5" DD disks. That's a bit of a problem.

Would it be possible to store disk images on an IDE drive and connect it to the ST, and load the games from there? I imagine they'd have to be converted somehow.

Another way would be to use 3.5" HD disks, but I doubt if that would work...

Hope this can be worked out."

Adam Klobukowski tells Mark:

"HD disks should work."

Hallvard Tanderaas tells Adam:

"Yes, but not reliably."

Nigel Williamson adds:

"I find that if you cover the non-adjustable hole on a HD disk you can format it to work on an STFM. it also works on a Win 95 PC so you can use it to transfer files between the 2 computers."

Steve Stupple tells Nigel and Adam:

"The problem with HD (high density) disks isn't down to the hole that is used for HD detection, but from the media itself.

The heads on a standard DD drive can corrupt the data around the track being written AND on the other side of the disk, due to the thinner media

used.

Of all the ST's i have, not fitted with a HD drive, not one will reliably allow me save and record the data. However of the many external drives i have tried, only one i have will read and write to one.

If you want to use HD disks on your ST, I would suggest using the modification that allows you to use a HD drive as a DD drive, then you should be able to use the disks with the hole covered. I cant remember off hand the address for the mod."

Ken Springer now asks about finding info about hard drives:

"There must be a place on the net somewhere that has the specifications for different SCSI drives.

In particular, I'm looking for the jumper settings on a Digital DSP3210 SCSI drive. I can find them for sale all over the place, but can I find the jumper settings? Not on your life.

Any suggestions, anyone?"

Mendel Baker tells Ken:

"Try:
http://support.ap.dell.com/docs/dta/DEC2GB/ "

Well folks, that's it for this week. Please have a safe, happy, and holy holiday. And please don't drink and drive... the life you save may be MINE! <grin>

'Till next week, keep your eye on the horizon, your nose to the grindstone, your ear to the ground, and your back to the wall. Now just try to get some work done in that position. <smile>

Can you tell that I'm in a silly mood? Nah, I didn't think so. 'Till next week, make sure you listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - The Sims Online! A New 'Zelda'!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" "Epidemic" of Violence in Games!?
                                  Game Publishers Face Hard Times!
                                  And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Log On to A ’Sims’ Ego Trip

A new chapter in The Sims’ story begins Tuesday with the launch of The Sims Online, a Net-based version of the game.

The tale has been a successful one. Publisher Electronic Arts has sold more than 8 million copies of the original game, which was released in 2000. It is the top-selling PC game of all time.

In this updated and perpetual game of life, a player creates an alter ego (you get three in the new game) who then goes about building a life: getting a job, buying property and having relationships. (The game is family-friendly and rated T for teens.) Hundreds of combinations are available to customize players’ looks, and gamers can re-create themselves or adopt entirely different personas.

In The Sims Online, however, a player interacts not with computer-created alter egos but with those being played by other real people.

"The interpersonal dynamics and relationships between people will become the components of the game," says Sims creator Will Wright of Maxis. EA bought Maxis, which Wright co-founded, in 1997.

To join the online game -- played only on personal computers -- Sims fans will need to buy the online-ready version ($49.95) and pay a monthly fee of $9.99. A special $74.95 autographed charter edition of the game comes with three free months online and other goodies (thesims.ea.com).

PC game sales have declined, overlooked in favor of console video games played on systems such as the Sony PlayStation 2 and Microsoft Xbox. The Sims Online could bring PC games a welcome jolt of recognition.

"The potential here for The Sims Online is obviously huge," says Jeff Green, editor in chief of Computer Gaming World magazine. "And the designers have done a remarkable job of making the online game look as familiar and simple as possible to those already familiar with The Sims. So the intimidation factor, for those who have never played online, should be next to nothing here."

The role-playing EverQuest has been the most successful online subscription title, with 450,000 paying players. "One of the issues is getting people to pay to play online games," says Schelley Olhava of research firm IDC. "If (The Sims Online) can get 500,000 people to pay, that is really good."

Because millions already are Sims fans, that could be a conservative estimate. Still, at that rate, the game could bring in about $85 million -- $25 million in software sales and $60 million for the first year of subscriptions.

A good sign that sim-mers are willing to accessorize: They also have snatched up 13 million copies of Sims add-ons such as Sims Unleashed, which lets sims get a dog or cat and learn to garden.

How did Wright, 42, decide to create The Sims when others were designing space battle games or virtual shooting galleries? "When I was a kid, I spent a lot of time building models. . . . One of my first attractions on the computer was simulations, a different type of modeling," he says. "For

me, the computer can be used to help you understand your environment, so, just naturally, I've wanted to model parts of the real world."

Wright, who has described The Sims as "a dollhouse for adults," offers some facts of Sims Online life:

* Create one of your sims in the simulated city of Alphaville. The largest city has more sims to meet.

* Don't buy property right away. "Take time to visit the world and see what is out there," he says.

* Develop a skill that fills a need. "I met a woman in the game the other day, and she started a singing-telegram service in the game," Wright says. "That's one of the creative approaches that people are doing. You provide a service where there is a demand."

Nintendo Sets Launch Date for New 'Zelda' Game

Video game publisher Nintendo Co. Ltd. on Tuesday set a late-March release date for the long-awaited new entry in its "Legend of Zelda" series and said customers who order the $49.95 game in advance will get two other games free.

Nintendo set March 24 as the release date for "The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker," a game that was first previewed in August 2001.

The new Zelda is the latest in a series that dates to the mid-1980s and has generated sales of more than 36 million units worldwide, making it one of the best-selling game franchises.

"Zelda" has long been one of Nintendo's cornerstones, along with the "Mario" franchise. Games in both series have traditionally been a major part in selling Nintendo's consoles, from the NES of the 1980s to the GameCube released last year.

Nintendo said people who place a deposit at select retailers after Feb. 16 to pre-order "Wind Waker" would also get a disk featuring two previous Zelda games: "Ocarina of Time" and "Ocarina of Time Master Quest."

"Ocarina of Time," released for Nintendo's late-1990s N64 console, has been lauded by the gaming press as one of the best video games of all time. "Master Quest" is an update to that game that was never released outside of Japan.

"Wind Waker" was originally targeted for a February 2003 launch, though Nintendo officials said in May they would release it as soon as this holiday season if it was ready.

The game was criticized initially for its graphic style, which some said was too cartoon-like. But it was warmly received at last May's Electronic Entertainment Expo, an industry show, even garnering some "Best in Show" awards.

Report Condemns Sex, Violence in Video Games

Warning of an "epidemic" of violence in video games, an industry watchdog on Thursday blasted some of the biggest titles of the year for treating women as sex objects and rewarding violence against them.

The National Institute on Media and the Family released its seventh annual report card on the video game industry at the Washington offices of Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman, a long-time advocate of restrictions on violent games.

"Video game violence is now an epidemic, and violence against women has become a black mark on the entire industry," the report's author and the institute's founder, David Walsh, said in a statement.

Lieberman called for hearings on the retail industry and their policies for restricting access by minors to violent video games.

"This relatively small but highly popular minority is not just pushing the envelope -- they are shooting, torturing and napalming it beyond all recognition, and beyond all decency," Lieberman said.

But at the same time, the Democratic senator, who is weighing a bid for president in 2004, admonished parents to take responsibility for their children's access to violent games. "Remember, you are your child's first -- and last -- line of defense," he said.

The video game industry, which has been singled out in the past for its efforts to establish an effective rating system, reacted sharply to the report.

"My reaction to that is (this) it's grotesquely unfair," Doug Lowenstein, the president of the Interactive Digital Software Association, told Reuters. "What we have here is a group with an ideological agenda."

The hottest new game of 2002, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.'s "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," took the brunt of the institute's criticism in its report.

"'Grand Theft Auto: Vice City' is receiving rave reviews for its technical excellence. However, its portrayal and mistreatment of women is disturbing," the report said. "The brutal murder of women as entertainment should be cause for great concern."

"Vice City" sold nearly 3 million copies in its first month on the market, according to analyst estimates, and is on track to be the best-selling game of 2002 and, possibly, one of the top sellers of all time. Take Two had no immediate comment.

The report also singled out Acclaim Entertainment Inc.'s, which features semi-naked strippers, saying it and games like it "degrade women and reinforce dangerous stereotypes by treating them as sexual objects." An Acclaim spokesman said the game was rated appropriately and that the game was never meant for or marketed toward children.

Overall, the institute gave the game industry an "F" grade, the first time it has done so.

"This year's grade reflects the dramatic increase in violent games and, in particular, games rewarding violence against women," the report's authors

said.

The report also lauded the Entertainment Software Rating Board, an industry panel that rates games, for working to review its rating system to ensure that game ratings are age-appropriate.

"The industry has made important steps in the last few years to accurately rate all games," the report said. "However, it is disturbing to see that some of the most popular games with adult themes are inappropriately deemed suitable for younger audiences."

A review of the ESRB database shows that of 672 titles rated for the three leading consoles -- Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2, Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox and Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s GameCube -- 80 carry the board's 17-and-over "Mature" rating, or about 12 percent of the total.

In the previous generation of consoles -- primarily Sony's PlayStation, Nintendo's N64 and Sega Corp.'s Dreamcast -- there were 193 "M"-rated titles out of 2,196 rated games, or about 9 percent in total.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has in past praised the ESRB as more proactive and effective than ratings systems in the movie, music and television industries.

"We've got the great ratings system, we're doing great on self-regulation," Lowenstein said. "I don't think this is a real honest and objective effort to assess the industry's performance."

Game Business Seen Splitting Into Haves, Have-Nots

A year ago, most analysts looked at the video game industry and saw the money rolling in like the gold coins in one of the gleeful payouts that reward a successful round of Nintendo's "Super Mario."

Now, the $30-billion game business looks more like one of the knock-down, drag-out battles for survival in a game of "Mortal Kombat" or "Dead or Alive."

This week's earnings warning by Activision Inc., the battered No. 2 game publisher, underscored the rapid change in an increasingly competitive business where the winners take all and the also-rans are being driven from retail shelves.

More evidence of the hit-driven trend for analysts: Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., on track to take the No. 2 spot from Activision, beat Wall Street estimates and raised guidance for the year this week on the strength of its smash release "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City."

At the start of 2002, with Microsoft Corp. and Nintendo Co. Ltd. having successfully launched new game consoles to compete with Sony Corp.'s already established PlayStation 2, most analysts and industry watchers expected an embarrassment of riches, not a fight for survival.

"We continue to believe this holiday season is shaping up to be one defined by the 'haves' (Electronic Arts and Take-Two) versus the 'have-nots' as top titles take a larger share of the market," UBS Warburg analyst Mike Wallace said in a research note on Wednesday.

Another analyst had an even more dour outlook on the crucial holiday season, the biggest sales period of the year.

"Given the dynamics of the retail market ... and lackluster demand for marginal titles, we believe that most of the interactive entertainment companies could possibly miss forecasts for the December quarter," Deutsche Bank Securities analyst Jeetil Patel said in a note.

Most U.S.-listed video game publishers traded lower on Wednesday morning, many sharply so, as investors tried to digest the implication of Activision's warning.

Activision was off 21 percent at $12.44. Shares in Bam Entertainment Inc. were off 13 percent at 40 cents. Midway Games Inc. was off 10 percent at $4.96 and THQ Inc. was down 8 percent at $13.68.

3DO Co. was trading 7.1 percent lower at $2.36, with Acclaim Entertainment Inc. off 5.4 percent at 86 cents, Take-Two down 5.4 percent at $23.28 and industry No. 1 Electronic Arts Inc. down 4 percent at $57.31.

For the year, the shares of only two publishers -- Electronic Arts and Take-Two -- have registered gains.

Market research groups have said they expect U.S. game hardware and software sales this year to hit a record $10 billion to $12 billion.

Given that rise, some analysts said they were stunned by the warning from Activision, which cut its fiscal 2003 revenue forecast by 12 percent to $823 million and its earnings per share view by an even deeper 32 percent to 88 cents. Analysts used words like "extreme" and "flabbergasted" to describe the warning.

The company cited both weak sales of holiday titles and a growing trend by retailers to order few copies of new titles at first in favor of larger reorders if a game sells well.

Analysts said that attitude at retail is forcing the industry to be more hit-driven, because a game has to sell well from day one if the company has any hope of making money on the title.

"In our opinion, the interactive entertainment industry is increasingly becoming a hits-driven business dominated by a handful of major brands," Deutsche Bank's Patel said.

"While we expected this trend to benefit both Activision and Electronic Arts, it now appears Electronic Arts represents one of the few beneficiaries of shifting consumer demand to well-established titles," he added.

With the need for hits becoming clear, companies have also ramped up their advertising spending. Video game ads dot the television airwaves, and Sony recently announced a deal for the PlayStation 2 to sponsor the annual Rose Bowl college football classic.

Activision's Chief Executive Bobby Kotick had recognized the increasingly high-stakes nature of the game business heading into the holiday season.

"It's going to be a Christmas of haves and have-nots, and I think it's going be more pronounced and less forgiving that last year," he said in a

September interview.

With Activision’s decline, analysts agreed that EA and Take-Two were the most likely beneficiaries. "Take-Two and EA, there’s nothing wrong with them," Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter told Reuters. "It’s not broken for them."

Video Game Industry Gets TV Award Show

It’s a hit-driven business given to flashy premieres and high-profile talent and now the video games business has gone fully Hollywood: it has its own red-carpet awards show.

The National Network, a unit of the MTV Networks division of Viacom Inc. on Thursday said it will develop, produce and air an award show for the video game industry to be shown toward the end of 2003. No venue for the show was announced.

The network said the two-hour show will honor categories like "Hottest Hero and Heroine," "Most Addictive," "Coolest Villain," "Best Game based on a Movie," "Best Celebrity Actor and Actress in a Game" and "Game of the Year."

Though many may not realize it, a number of top video games feature celebrity cameos. The hottest game of the year, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," features voice work by Ray Liotta, Dennis Hopper, former football star Lawrence Taylor, and porn star Jenna Jameson and others.

The network cited a fit between its target audience -- people ages 25 to 34 -- and the core audience for video games as a reason for doing the first-of-its-kind show.

While the games business has had awards events in the past, they have traditionally been tied to industry conferences and have not been televised.

Comcast Corp. launched a digital cable channel devoted solely to video games, G4, earlier this year.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Upgraded Netscape Stops Pop-Ups

AOL Time Warner subsidiary Netscape Communications has made the newest version of its Web browser, Netscape 7.01, which includes pop-up ad blocking capabilities, available for download from its Web site.

Netscape 7.01 can be configured so as to prevent the appearance of pop-up ads on a user's computer screen.

It also includes AOL e-mail features allowing users to unsend mail, check message status, and keep messages marked as new, Netscape said on its Web site.

Additionally, the latest version of the Netscape browser features "minor stability and performance enhancements," as well as giving users the ability to view several tabbed pages as that user's home page, Netscape said.

Netscape 7.01 runs with Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems, the company said.

Netscape already included a similar pop-up blocker as part of its Mozilla browser.

The Mozilla development project, mozilla.org, is an open source program, which supplies a free Web browser with the same name. Selected features in Mozilla are included in the latest Netscape browser.

AOL Awarded Almost $7 Million in Spam Case

A U.S. court has granted Internet giant America Online almost $7 million in damages from a company that the Internet giant said sent its users nearly 1 billion unwanted e-mails touting adult web sites, AOL said on Monday.

The ruling is America Online's second win over CN Productions and its largest reward to date in an anti-spam case, an AOL spokesman said. The unsolicited mass messages known as spam are one of the biggest annoyances for e-mail users.

American Online, the Internet division of AOL Time Warner Inc. and the world's largest Internet service, said the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District in Virginia awarded it statutory damages and broadened the scope of a prior injunction against CN and its owner Jay Nelson.

The decision was reached in late October, but unsealed only recently and announced by the company only on Monday.

The complaint, originally filed in 1998, charged CN with sending AOL subscribers nearly a billion e-mails advertising adult Web sites.

Dulles, Va.-based America Online won an injunction against CN in 1999 and that year asked the court to expand its investigations to third parties working with CN -- and found that it extended outside U.S. borders.

AOL said the ruling was the first in which statutory damages were awarded under an amended Virginia anti-spam statute.

"This is an important legal victory in the fight against spam and it sends a clear, distinct message to spammers: AOL is prepared to use all of the legal and technological tools available to shut down spammers who inundate the mailboxes of AOL members with unwanted and often offensive junk e-mail," said Randall Boe, AOL's general counsel, in a statement.

The $7 million award will be use for general purposes, the AOL spokesman said.

Nelson’s counsel was not immediately available for comment.

In the latest version of its Internet software, America Online implemented a new tool that lets users report incidents of spam with the click of a button. The online giant has won more than 20 cases against spam companies.

Russian Firm Cleared in US Digital Copyright Trial

A Federal Court jury on Tuesday found a Russian company not guilty of criminal charges that it violated U.S. copyright law by selling a software program that can crack the digital locks used to secure electronic books.

Moscow-based ElcomSoft Co. Ltd. was charged in federal court of violating the 1998 U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act by selling a program that circumvents the digital copyright protections on Adobe Systems Inc. software.

The two-week trial in San Jose, California was the first criminal prosecution under the controversial DMCA, which prohibits the sale of technology used to break the digital locks on digitally formatted movies, music and other software.

The jury of eight men and four women deliberated for about two days before reaching the verdict on Tuesday. The trial had hinged on whether ElcomSoft had "willfully" violated the U.S. law, lawyers for the defense said.

"They never intended to violate the law," said defense attorney Joseph Burton of the San Francisco law firm of Duane Morris.

"We accept the jury’s verdict," Kevin Ryan, U.S. Attorney for Northern California, said in a statement. "While disappointed, we are also pleased that the judge upheld the constitutionality of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the jurisdiction of the United States to bring these cases."

ElcomSoft’s program, which sold online for about a month in mid-2001 for $99 before Adobe complained, allows users to make copies of electronic books, transfer them to laptops and have the computer read them aloud to the blind.

Prosecutors contended the program was akin to a burglar tool that could be used to make illegal copies of electronic books.

ElcomSoft President Alexander Katalov testified that he did not think the program, which was legal in Russia, was illegal in the United States. He said the program was not meant to be used for electronic books that had not been legally purchased.

Observers on both sides of the DMCA debate said they were pleased that the case was finally resolved.

"Today’s jury verdict sends a strong message to federal prosecutors who believe that tool makers should be thrown in jail just because a copyright

owner doesn’t like the tools," said Fred von Lohmann, an attorney at San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation, which works to protect civil liberties in cyberspace.

"Although the jury decided the Digital Millennium Copyright Act had not in this case been violated, we are glad that prosecutors do believe that such cases have an appropriate place in our criminal justice system," said Robert Holleyman, chief executive of the Business Software Alliance trade group.

The case caused an international uproar after ElcomSoft programmer Dmitry Sklyarov was arrested in July 2001 following a talk he gave about the program at the DefCon hacker conference in Las Vegas.

Prosecutors agreed to drop charges against him in exchange for his testimony. His videotaped deposition was played in court by the prosecution and he was questioned in person in court by the defense.

Copyright holders pushed for the DMCA, arguing that they need it to prevent easy piracy in the digital age. Opponents say the law gives copyright owners more rights in cyberspace than they have elsewhere.

AOL Granted IM Patent

America Online has recently acquired a U.S. patent for instant messaging, potentially placing it in a position to edge out rival players and reap significant rewards from the booming chat market.

ATT Parsons in Houston who specializes in intellectual property and patent claims, patents can be enforced from the date issued. However, the 20-year life of a patent is measured from the filing date.

While some patent holders choose to sue patent infringers upon issue of their patent, others never seek claim over infringing parties, Norvell noted.

The patent comes at a time when IM players such as Yahoo, Microsoft, and AOL are all gunning not only for the broad consumer market, but also for the nascent corporate messaging market.

A representative for Microsoft said Thursday that the company is not commenting on AOL’s new patent. No one from Yahoo was immediately available to comment.

Still, the Dulles, Virginia-based Internet giant has not yet said whether or not it will use the patent. The company holds numerous patents covering varying aspects of its intellectual property.

Internet Company Owner Charged in Fraud Scheme

The owner of a New York Internet service provider and three employees were charged on Wednesday with stealing millions of dollars from a federal program aimed at providing funding for Internet technology to economically disadvantaged schools.

John Angelides, 65, the owner of Connect 2 Internet Networks, was charged in Manhattan federal court with eight counts of fraud, obstruction of justice and other charges. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 60 years in prison, and a fine of $2 million.

He and three others were charged with violating the E-Rate Program that helps qualified schools purchase networking equipment and Internet service so that students may use the Internet as a learning tool.

According to the complaint, the company allegedly charged the government high prices for its services but misrepresented to the government that schools were paying their share of the costs, as they are required to do under the program.

The schools are required to pay a portion of the costs to make sure that they negotiate for the best prices and only buy equipment they really need.

Prosecutors said that Connect 2 Internet has been the E-Rate Internet service provider for more than 200 schools since 1998 and has received more than $9 million in federal funds under the program.

eBay Sues Operator of eBaytoo.com

The online auction house eBay has sued a man for allegedly operating a similar business on the Internet.

John Wederman, of Schenectady, who operates eBaytoo.com, allegedly violated eBay’s copyright in an attempt to "trade on the eBay name and to take advantage of initial consumer unfamiliarity and confusion," according to the lawsuit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Albany.

eBay is seeking unspecified damages and legal fees.

Both sites allow buying and selling of items ranging from clothing and jewelry to furniture and automobiles. The one allegedly run out of Schenectady since October permits sale of Nazi items and Ku Klux Klan items, which Delaware-based eBay does not allow on its site, the suit said.

Wederman registered as an eBay user in April 2000 and made about 20 transactions as both a buyer and seller, but his membership was suspended when he failed to pay the company $132.56 in fees, the lawsuit said.

Wederman could not be reached for comment.

Microsoft, Two States Clash on Lawyer Fees

Massachusetts and West Virginia, the two holdout states seeking tougher penalties against Microsoft Corp. in its antitrust case, told the trial judge that the software company owes them $2.32 million in attorneys’ fees.

But, in an unusual move, the states urged U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly to delay any decision that might force Microsoft to pay the fees immediately. The states’ lawyers said that, while the money would be

helpful to pay current legal expenses, they wanted to avoid a contentious public fight with Microsoft that could distract from their courtroom arguments.

The judge last month approved a sweeping antitrust settlement among Microsoft, the Bush administration and nine states. In doing so, she rejected arguments by nine other states - including Massachusetts and West Virginia - that tougher sanctions were needed to restore competition in the technology industry.

Seven of those states then decided against appealing her decision, and Microsoft agreed to pay them $25 million in legal reimbursements to be divided based on how much they spent on the antitrust case. California contributed most of those legal costs.

This latest twist suggests that Microsoft, with $28.3 billion in sales this year, could aggressively contest the fee payments to Massachusetts and West Virginia as a legal strategy. The dispute over legal fees was outlined in court papers filed with the court last week and disclosed Tuesday.

"This is money these two states would have received had they not decided to pursue an appeal," Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler said. "Maybe we'll see whether this is an issue the court needs to resolve." He declined to say whether Microsoft believes $2.32 million was an appropriate amount for reimbursement.

Massachusetts and West Virginia said Microsoft did not agree that it owes them $2,327,947.38, and that Microsoft's lawyer, Bruce Braun, said the company opposes their request for the judge to delay a decision on payment.

Massachusetts said it was owed $2.05 million in fees and expenses, with the rest - about $271,000 - owed to West Virginia.

To support their payment claims, Massachusetts and West Virginia included charts showing the number of hours their lawyers worked on the antitrust case.

Government lawyers are paid fixed salaries, but the law calculates reimbursed fees based on hourly rates for private attorneys. For example, Massachusetts billed Microsoft $460 per hour for work by its attorney general, Thomas Reilly, who makes $122,500 a year.

West Virginia Assistant Attorney General Douglas L. Davis said no decision has been made whether Massachusetts and West Virginia will retain the law firm of Williams and Connolly, which charged the nine states $10.07 million for its work arguing for tougher antitrust sanctions.

Trade Groups Appeal Microsoft Settlement

Two computer industry trade groups on Friday said they would appeal an antitrust settlement with Microsoft Corp. that was endorsed by a federal judge last month.

The Computer & Communications Industry Association and the Software and Information Industry Association said they had filed with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, announcing their intention to appeal.

On Nov. 1, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly approved, with minor adjustments, a settlement crafted by the U.S. Justice Department and Microsoft a year earlier.

Massachusetts and West Virginia, part of a group of nine states that had tried to obtain more stringent sanctions against Microsoft, have separately said they will appeal the settlement as too weak to address the company's illegal conduct.

In the deal approved by Kollar-Kotelly, Microsoft agreed to measures that included giving computer makers greater freedom to feature rival software on their machines by allowing them to hide some Microsoft icons on the Windows desktop.

An appeals court ruled in June 2001 that Microsoft had illegally maintained its Windows operating system monopoly, but rejected a trial court proposal to break the company in two.

The case was then transferred to Kollar-Kotelly to determine the appropriate remedies in the case. She heard 32 days of testimony to determine what sanctions should be imposed on Microsoft.

The two industry groups that flagged their intention to appeal are longstanding critics of Microsoft and have lobbied for tough government action against the company.

They said the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia should review whether the settlement goes far enough in remedying Microsoft's antitrust violations.

"After careful analysis of the terms of the settlement and after carefully reading Judge Kollar-Kotelly's ruling we respectfully conclude that this settlement is not in the public interest. We believe the appeals court should have an opportunity to review that determination," said Ken Wasch, president of the software industry association.

Asked about the latest opposition to the settlement, Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler said it was "widely recognized that Judge Kotelly was very thorough in reviewing and addressing all issues related to the (approval) process."

Student Helps Cops Nab Alleged Swindler

Spinning a web of Internet informants, a student doggedly pursued a bogus-check writer who allegedly cheated him out of a computer through eBay, enabling police to make an arrest.

Eric Smith, a University of New Orleans student, initially had few clues to find the person who bought his Apple laptop on the Internet auction site with the bogus check.

He had an e-mail address, a cell phone number and the Chicago street address where he shipped the laptop, but the address turned out to be nothing more than a mail drop.

By posting the scant details on Internet message boards and chat rooms, Smith got responses from more than a hundred fellow Macintosh users. They

found the registration of the phone number and provided evidence that a Los Angeles resident had been similarly swindled.

Smith said the FBI and the Secret Service declined the case because it didn’t involve a significant loss; the Chicago Police Department took a report.

Smith finally decided to set a trap by using his girlfriend’s eBay account to set up another computer sale and stake out the buyer. The next e-mail said to send the computer to suburban Markham, where police were glad to help.

"I don’t know much about computers, but I have a passion for this kind of work," police Sgt. Jim Knapp said Friday. "And Eric had made it so easy. He’d really worked to put together this nice little package that couldn’t be ignored."

Melvin Christmas, 38, was arrested Thursday and charged with two counts of forgery; it was unclear whether he was in custody. Telephone messages left with police and at a listing for a Melvin Christmas in Chicago were not immediately returned Saturday.

Knapp said the suspect may have been part of a theft ring. About a dozen other people have contacted the department, saying they lost computers the same way, he said.

’Iraq Oil’ Worm Oozes Onto the Net

A new network worm that spreads through shared folders on machines running Microsoft Windows NT, 2000, and XP has been detected, according to advisories posted by a number of antivirus software makers.

The new worm, called W32/Lioten, also goes by the name Iraq_oil, Datrix, W32.Lioten, and I-Worm.Lioten, according to an advisory posted by security company F-Secure of Helsinki, Finland on Tuesday.

It is not known what else the worm does besides propagate itself, nor is the relevance of the "Iraq oil" reference understood, F-Secure said.

Unlike other worms that spread through mass e-mailing, Lioten scans the Internet for vulnerable Windows PCs that are sharing folders with other users on a home or business network.

Leading antivirus software makers, including Symantec; Network Associates, maker of McAfee; F-Secure; and Sophos gave Lioten a "low" threat rating. They indicate the worm has not spread widely on the Internet and few if any infections linked to the Lioten worm have been reported.

Still, antivirus companies on Tuesday posted updated virus definitions that are capable of detecting the Lioten worm. They all recommend that customers running the affected operating systems download the latest virus definitions for their antivirus software.

Machines that are located behind a firewall are likely to be protected from the new worm. Even basic firewall configurations will block access to port 445, according to F-Secure.

The worm finds new hosts to infect by randomly generating and attempting to connect to IP addresses on the Internet. The worm listens for responses on port 445 from machines using Windows Server Message Block (SMB), a file and resource-sharing protocol used in Windows environments.

Once the new worm receives a response from a server, it attempts to crack that PC using a so-called brute force attack. The worm first obtains a list of user accounts on the PC and then attempts to log in to each of those accounts by supplying values from its own list of likely passwords such as "admin," "root," "1234" and "asdf."

If the worm is successful in logging on to a PC using any of the user accounts, it places a copy of itself, iraq_oil.exe, in the System32 directory on that system and creates a process on the machine to run the new executable.

Man Pleads Guilty to Spreading Viruses

A 22-year-old Web designer pleaded guilty Friday to spreading three computer viruses over the Internet.

Simon Vallor, from Llandudno in Wales, appeared at Bow Street Magistrates Court in London and admitted spreading three viruses, including GoKar and Redesi.

Though the viruses can automatically spread through e-mail when someone opens one, their distribution was relatively limited.

Vallor was arrested in February after the FBI passed details of the viruses to the computer crime unit of London’s Metropolitan Police.

Vallor was released on unconditional bail. No date has been set for his sentencing at London’s Southwark Crown Court, when he will face a maximum penalty of five years in jail and an unspecified fine.

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